

**Tool 2(proc).3. Alpha District Case Study (p. 1 of 3)**

## **Alpha School District Case Study – Read and Discuss Activity**

Read the case study below. Highlight or make notes where you see examples of the Operating Principles for Designing Professional Development.

When you finish your reading, discuss the items on the Structured Response Discussion sheet, referring to the Operating Principles as appropriate.

When the object of professional development is accomplishing specific student achievement goals, designing professional development means more than planning a workshop. The content selected for professional development must align precisely with student needs for growth, learning opportunities must provide sufficient knowledge and skill to enable classroom implementation of new learning, the workplace must be organized to support teacher collaboration as they solve the issues presented by implementing new learning, and appropriate interim student measures must be administered so that student learning can guide teacher collaboration and implementation efforts. The planning and energy required by this broader vision of the staff development process, however, cannot short-circuit the careful planning of learning opportunities. In the following example, we illustrate the components of the training model for one type of professional development content.

### **Data and Objectives**

After careful study and analysis of its student achievement patterns, alpha district has concluded that while the majority of its students appear to meet minimum standards for proficiency in reading and math, many are achieving at a very average level. Item analysis of standardized test data indicate the majority of students miss items requiring higher order thinking and reasoning skills. Furthermore, this phenomenon worsens at the middle and high school levels, when student maturity and the demands of the curriculum are at their highest level. The leadership team of the alpha district decided to consciously address student needs for complex thinking and reasoning skills through their staff development program, and to measure student progress by focusing on the subset of test items requiring higher order thinking skills in reading and math.

### **Selecting Content and Providers**

Careful analysis of research on strategies and programs with a history of increasing higher-order thinking skills resulted in the selection of inductive teaching strategies and their corollary cooperative learning strategies. While Alpha District's AEA agreed to serve as the "approved provider" to support the entire professional development cycle, and an expert in inductive and cooperative strategies was hired to provide training in the staff development content.

### **Designing Learning Opportunities**

The Alpha District's leadership team worked with the expert trainer to design a series of learning opportunities for district teachers. Specifically, they examined the *theory* that would need to be understood, the types of *demonstrations* that would be necessary, and the types of *practice* that could be provided during workshops.

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#### **Theory**

The Alpha District leadership team wanted to accomplish two things with this component of the training. While they had thoroughly investigated the research underlying inductive and cooperative strategies, the majority of district teachers had seen only an overview. They asked the trainer to begin the theory component with a review of the literature on the effects of the inductive and cooperative strategies that would be learned in the workshop. Their belief was that a thorough understanding of this research base would help teachers set high expectations for student intellectual behavior and justify the time and energy required to learn and implement them. They also requested that the trainer include in her presentation the theory, or explanation, for why inductive thinking and cooperative strategies work; e.g., information about how the brain processes information as well as the social nature of learning.

#### **Demonstrations**

While the leadership team acknowledged that measurement of student learning would focus on reading and math, they expected teachers of all subjects to work toward the collective objective of increasing student thinking and reasoning skills. They therefore requested that demonstration lessons of inductive thinking and cooperative learning include examples in language arts, math, science, social studies, and foreign language. The leadership team realized that demonstrations in every subject at every grade level would not be possible, given the time constraints of workshops, but they wanted enough variety in the demonstrations to enable teachers to see multiple possibilities for application.

#### **Practice**

Given the importance of early practice when learning new skills, the leadership team then discussed with the expert trainer ways in which practice could be worked into the workshop settings. After brainstorming and discussing multiple options, they settled on the following plan.

First, teams of four teachers would be provided four inductive thinking lessons. Each individual would have time to study the lesson they were to teach, and then each teacher would practice teaching an inductive lesson to rest of his/her group.

Second, small groups of “job-alike” teachers would design lessons using their own curricular materials and then share the products of their initial development. In this manner, everyone would have an opportunity to test their own understanding of the new strategies and would leave the workshop prepared to practice immediately in their classrooms.

Third, collaborative teams would be formed in the workshop so that initial practice in lesson development could be supported by workshop facilitators. By providing a structure for collaborative work and supporting it in the workshop, teacher teams would be prepared to continue this work in their school settings.

Fourth, expectations for initial classroom practice would be stated and commitments to practice solicited.

Finally, follow-up training sessions would be scheduled (more frequently for the first few months of implementation) in order to support early practice with the newly learned strategies.

#### **Collaboration, Implementation, and Evaluation**

To implement new learning requires collegial support in the workplace and the study of implementation patterns in conjunction with interim measures of student learning. It is critical that training and learning opportunities provide teachers the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in authentic implementation efforts.

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**Structured Response Discussion Guide**

The study of the Alpha District is organized based on the components of the Iowa Professional Development Model cycle. Discuss where you see evidence of the Model's Operating Principles in the Alpha Case Study.

**Participative Decision-Making**

**Focus On Curriculum, Instruction, And Assessment**

**Simultaneity**

**Leadership**

**What implications does this discussion have for your local design decisions?**